The Hero of Tradition

Author(s): Lord Raglan

Source: *Folklore*, Sep., 1934, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Sep., 1934), pp. 212-231

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of Folklore Enterprises, Ltd.

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1256167

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

Taylor & Francis, Ltd. and *Folklore Enterprises, Ltd.* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Folklore*

THE HERO OF TRADITION

BY LORD RAGLAN

(*Read at Meeting, 20th June,* 1934)

SOME years ago I had occasion to study the story of Oedipus, and to try to analyse it. I was struck by the fact that a number of the incidents of the story were remarkably similar to incidents in the stories of Theseus and Romulus. I then studied the stories of a number of other Greek traditional heroes, and found that when these stories were divided into separate incidents there were certain types of incidents which ran through all, or most, of the stories.

Whether these parallels have any significance, or whether they are merely accidental coincidences, or the kind of things that might happen to any hero, is a question to which we shall come later. My first task is to show that these parallels exist, and for that purpose it is necessary to tabulate and number them. What I have done is to take a dozen heroes whose stories are narrated in sufficient detail, to tabulate the incidents in their careers, and to take as typical those incidents which occur in the majority of the stories. Some of these incidents are miraculous, while others might seem insignificant, but everything that seemed to me to be part of the pattern, for I have been convinced that there is a pattern, has been included. Having arrived at this pattern, I then tried it on heroes from outside the classical world, and I hope that the results will seem as striking to you as they have done to me. The pattern is as follows :

STORY OF THE HERO OF TRADITION

1. His mother is a royal virgin.
2. His father is a king, and

3. Often a near relative of his mother, but
4. The circumstances of his conception are unusual, and
5. He is also reputed to be the son of a god.
6. At birth an attempt is made, often by his father, to kill him, but
7. He is spirited away, and
8. Reared by foster-parents in a far country.
9. We are told nothing of his childhood, but
10. On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom.
11. After a victory over the king and/or a giant, dragon or wild beast,
12. He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and
13. Becomes king.
14. For a time he reigns uneventfully, and
15. Prescribes laws, but
16. Later he loses favour with the gods and/or his subjects, and
17. Is driven from the throne and city.
18. He meets with a mysterious death,
19. Often at the top of a hill.
20. His children, if any, do not succeed him.
21. His body is not buried, but nevertheless
22. He has one or more holy sepulchres.

Oedipus

His mother Jocasta is (1) a princess, and his father is (2) King Laius, who has sworn to have no connection with her but (4) does so when drunk, probably (5) in the character of Dionysus. Laius (6) tries to kill him, but (7) he is spirited away, and (8) reared by the king of Corinth. (9) We hear nothing of his childhood, but (10) on reaching manhood he returns to Thebes, gaining (11) victories over his father and the Sphinx. He (12) marries Jocasta and (13) becomes king. (14) For some years he reigns uneventfully, but (16) later comes to be regarded as the cause of a plague, and (17) is deposed and driven into exile. He meets with (18) a mys-

terious death at (19) a place near Athens called the Steep Pavement. (20) He is succeeded by Creon, by whose means he was deposed, and (21) though the place of his burial is uncertain, he has (22) several holy sepulchres.

He scores twenty points out of twenty-two.

Theseus

His mother, Aethra, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (2) King Aegeus, who is induced (4) to have intercourse with her by a trick. He is also (5) reputed to be the son of Poseidon. At birth he is (6) hidden from the Pallantidae, who wish to kill him, and (8) reared by his maternal grandfather. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but (10) on reaching manhood he proceeds to Athens, (11) killing monsters on the way. He marries (12) two heiress princesses in succession, but (13) succeeds his father, whose death (11) he causes. For a time (14) he reigns peacefully, and (15) prescribes laws, but (16) later becomes unpopular, is (17) driven from Athens, and (18) thrown or falls from (19) a high cliff by order of (20) Menestheus, his successor, who is no relation. His burial place is unknown (21) but bones alleged to be his are (22) laid in a holy sepulchre at Athens.

He scores twenty.

Romulus

His mother, Rhea, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (2) King Amulius, who is (3) her uncle, and (4) visits her in armour. He is also (5) reputed to be the son of Mars. At birth (6) his father tries to kill him, but (7) he is wafted away, and (8) he is brought up by foster-parents at a distance. On reaching manhood he (10) returns to his birthplace, and having (11) killed his father and gained a magical victory over his brother, (12) founds Rome and becomes king. His marriage is uncertain, and he is said to have performed some feats after his accession, but he (15) prescribes laws, and (16) later becomes unpopular. Leaving

the city (17) after his deposition had been decided upon, he was (18) carried to the sky in a chariot of fire. His successor was a stranger (20). His body not having been found (21), he was worshipped in a Temple.

We can give him seventeen points.

Heracles

His mother, Alcmene, is (1) a royal virgin. Her husband is (2) King Amphitryon, who is (3) her first cousin, but Heracles is reputed to be (5) the son of Zeus, who (4) visited her in the guise of Amphitryon. At his birth (6) Hera tries to kill him. On reaching manhood he (11) performs feats and wins victories, after which he proceeds (10) to Calydon, where he marries (12) the king's daughter, and (13) becomes ruler. (14) He remains there quietly for some years, after which an accidental manslaughter compels him (17) to flee from the country. He disappears from a funeral pyre (18), on the top of Mt. Oeta (19). His sons do not succeed him (20). His body is not found (21) and he is worshipped in temples.

He scores seventeen points.

Perseus

His mother, Danae, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (5) Zeus, who visits her in a shower of gold. His grandfather (6) tries to kill him at birth, but (7) he is wafted away and (8) reared by the King of Seriphos. We are told (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he overcomes monsters and returns to his birthplace (10), where he kills his father (11) or uncle, marries a princess (12) and (13) becomes king in his place. (14) We hear nothing of his reign, and his end is variously related (18), though in one version he is killed by his successor. His children do not succeed him (20). His burial place is unknown (21) but (22) he is worshipped at shrines.

He scores sixteen points.

Jason

His mother, name uncertain, is (1) a princess, and his father is (2) King Aeson. His uncle Pelias (6) tries to kill him at birth, but (7) he is spirited away, and (8) brought up elsewhere by Chiron. We hear nothing (9) of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he makes a journey in which he (11) wins the Golden Fleece, marries (12) a princess, kills (11) his uncle, and (13) becomes king. He is (17) driven from the throne and city. His death is (18) obscure, and his children (20) do not succeed him. His burial place (21) is unknown, but he has several shrines (22).

He scores fourteen points.

Bellerophon

His mother, Eurymede, is (1) a princess, and his father is (2) King Glaucus, but he is also (5) reputed to be the son of Poseidon. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he (10) travels to his future kingdom, (11) overcomes a monster, (12) marries the king's daughter and (13) becomes king. (14) We hear nothing of his reign, but later he (16) becomes hated by the gods, and (17) goes into exile. His fate is (18) obscure, though it includes (19) an attempted ascent to the sky. His children (20) do not succeed him, his burial place (21) is unknown, but (22) he was worshipped at Corinth.

He scores sixteen points.

Pelops

His mother, Dione, is (1) a goddess and his father is King Tantalus (2), but he is also reputed to be the son of (5) Poseidon. His father (6) kills and cooks him, but the gods restore him to life. We hear nothing (9) of his childhood, but (10) on reaching manhood he journeys to his future kingdom, (11) defeats and kills the king, (12) marries his daughter, and (13) becomes king. We hear (14) very little of his actions when king, except that (15) he regulates the

Olympic Games. We are not told (18) about his death, but (20) his children do not succeed him, and (22) he has a holy sepulchre at Olympia.

He scores fourteen points.

Asclepius

His mother, Coronis, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (5) Apollo, who (6) nearly kills him at birth. He is (7) spirited away, and (8) reared by Chiron at a distance. On reaching manhood (11) he overcomes death, becomes a man of power (13) and (15) prescribes the laws of medicine, but (16) incurs the enmity of Zeus, who (18) destroys him with a flash of lightning. His burial place is unknown (21) but he has a number of alleged tombs (22).

He scores at least twelve points.

Dionysus

His mother, Semele, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (5) Zeus, who (3) was Semele's uncle by marriage, and who visits her (4) in a thunderstorm. Hera (6) tries to kill him at birth, but he is (7) miraculously saved, and (8) brought up in a remote spot. We hear (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he (10) travels into Asia, (11) gains victories, and becomes a ruler (13). For a time (14) he rules prosperously, and prescribes (15) laws of agriculture, etc., but later (17) is carried into exile. He (18) goes down to the dead, but later (19) ascends Olympus. He seems (20) to have no children. He had no burial place (21), but numerous shrines and temples (22).

We can give him nineteen points.

Apollo

His mother, Leto, is (1) a royal virgin, and his father is (5) Zeus, who is (3) her first cousin. At birth he is (6) in danger from Hera, but his mother (7) escapes with him, and (8) he is reared at Delos. We hear nothing (9) of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he (10) goes to Delphi,

where he kills the Python (11), becomes king (13) and prescribes (15) the laws of music etc.

We hear no more, but he has scored eleven points.

Zeus

Is the son of Rhea and Cronus, who are goddess and god (1 and 5) and also brother and sister (3). At birth (6) his father tries to kill him, but (7) he is spirited away, and (8) reared in Crete. We hear nothing (9) of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he sets forth (10) for Olympus, (11) defeats the Titans, (12) marries his sister, and (13) becomes king in succession to his father. He reigns supreme (14), and prescribes laws (15). Nevertheless he has a holy sepulchre in Crete (22), and hilltops are particularly sacred to him (19).

He scores fifteen points.

Joseph

His mother, Rachel, is (1) the daughter of a patriarch, and his father, Jacob, is (2) a patriarch and (3) her first cousin. His mother conceives him (4) by eating mandrakes. In his childhood his brothers (6) attempt to kill him, but he is saved by a stratagem (7), and reared (8) in Egypt. On reaching manhood he is the victor in a contest in dream-interpretation and weather forecasting (11), is married to a lady of high rank (12), and becomes (13) ruler of Egypt. He reigns prosperously (14) and prescribes laws (15), but we are told nothing of the latter part of his life.

He has scored twelve points.

Moses

His parents (1 and 2) were of the principal family of the Levites, and (3) near relatives. He was also (5) reputed to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Pharaoh (6) attempts to kill him at birth, but (7) he is wafted away, and (8) reared secretly. We are told (9) nothing of his childhood, but on reaching manhood he kills a man (11) and goes to Midian (10), where (12) he marries the ruler's daughter. Returning

to Egypt, he gains (11) a series of magical victories over Pharaoh, after which he becomes a ruler (13). For a time his rule (14) is successful and he prescribes laws (15), but later he loses (16) the favour of Jehovah, is deposed (17) from his leadership, and (18) disappears mysteriously from (19) the top of a mountain. His children (20) do not succeed him. He has no burial place (21), but nevertheless has a holy sepulchre (22).

He scores twenty-one points.

Elijah

After (11) a victory in a rainmaking contest, he becomes a sort of dictator (13). After a period of success (14) there is a plot (16) against him. He flees to Beersheba (17), and later (18) disappears mysteriously. His successor, Elisha, (20) is no relation. (21) Though not buried, he has (22) a holy sepulchre.

We do not know the circumstances of his birth, but we can give him nine points.

Sigurd or Siegfried

His mother, Sieglinde, is (1) a princess, and his father (2) King Siegmund, who is her brother (3), and whom she visits (4) in the guise of another woman. On reaching manhood he (11) kills a dragon, (12) marries a princess, and (13) becomes a ruler. For a time (14) he prospers, but later (16) there is a plot against him and he is killed.

He scores nine only, but I believe the whole story is there and has been cut up.

Arthur

His mother, Igraine, is (1) a princess, and her husband is (2) the Duke of Cornwall. He is, however, reputed to be (5) the son of Uther Pendragon, who (4) visited Igraine in the Duke's likeness. At birth he is apparently in no danger, but nevertheless is (7) spirited away, and (8) reared in a distant part of the country. We hear (9) nothing of his

childhood, but (10) on reaching manhood he travels to London, wins (11) a magical victory, and is (13) chosen king. After other victories he marries Guenever (12), the heiress of the Round Table. After this he reigns (14) uneventfully, but later (17) goes abroad, and is (16) dethroned in his absence. (18) He meets with a mysterious death. His children (20) do not succeed him.

He scores sixteen points.

Nyikang

Nyikang is the traditional hero of the Shilluk of the White Nile, and his story conforms in some respects to the type. He is the son of (2) a king and (1) his mother Nyikaia was apparently a crocodile princess.

We hear nothing (9) of his childhood, but on reaching manhood his brother defeats him and threatens his life, whereupon he goes to (10) another country, and (12) marries a king's daughter. After (11) a number of victories, magical and actual, he becomes king. For a time he reigns prosperously (14), and (15) prescribes laws, but at last the people began to complain against him (16). Distressed at this (18) he disappears mysteriously. His body was not buried (21), but nevertheless he has (22) a holy sepulchre.

He scores twelve points.

The fact that the life of a hero of tradition can be divided up into a large number of incidents—I have taken twenty-two, but one could easily make it more—has suggested to me that the story of the hero of tradition is the story, not of real incidents in the life of a real man, but of ritual incidents in the career of a ritual personage. It does not necessarily follow from this that none of the heroes whom I have cited had any real existence, but it does, I think, follow that if they really did exist their activities were largely of a ritual character, or else that their stories were altered to make them conform to type.

I shall have something more to say about that later; what I propose to do now is to go through these incidents—what I regard as these typical incidents—in the life of the hero of tradition, and make some suggestions as to their significance.

The first point that we note is that the incidents fall definitely into three groups—those connected with the hero's birth, those connected with his accession to the throne, and those connected with his death. They correspond, that is to say, with the three principal *rites de passage*, that is to say the rites at birth, initiation and death. I shall have more to say on this when we reach point 9; now I will start at the beginning.

The first fact we note is that, except in the case of Moses, for whom there were no actual royalties available, the hero is always the son of royal parents; that in nearly every case he is the first child of his mother, and, except where his father is a god, of his father, and that with very few exceptions his father never marries twice. There is, of course, nothing very wonderful in all this—many kings have been the eldest child of monogamous parents—but I have laid stress on it because it seems definitely to be part of the pattern. There is a type of folk tale in which the hero, though he wins a princess and a throne, is of humble birth, but I suspect this of being a derived form, in which merely the central group of incidents is narrated, and in which the hero's birth therefore becomes unimportant.

The fact that in many cases the hero's parents are near relatives brings to mind the widespread custom by which kings marry their sisters, and with which I have dealt elsewhere.

The circumstances in which our hero is begotten are very puzzling. When, as in the case of Heracles, a god takes the form of the hero's father, we are reminded that the Pharaoh, on particular occasions, approached his queen in the guise of a god. In our stories however, the disguises assumed by

the god are extremely varied. He may appear as a thunderstorm, a swan, or a shower of gold. We may conclude that the attribution of divine descent to a hero has nothing to do with his heroism, but is associated with the ritual union of a princess to her own husband, disguised as a god. It is not at all clear how a man disguised himself as a shower of gold; one can guess at the explanation, *i.e.*, that in a darkened room the sunlight was allowed to fall on him alone, but this is merely a guess.

We now come to the attempt on the hero's life at birth, which happens in almost every case, and is quite clearly part of the pattern. We are all familiar with such rites as the Phoenician one, by which the eldest son was burnt as a sacrifice to Moloch. In our stories, it would seem, a pretence is made of sacrificing the child, and in some cases an animal is sacrificed instead. It is often the father who tries to kill the infant hero, and this fact brings the stories into line with that of Abraham and Isaac. The attempt on the life of Moses, like that on the other heroes, was made at birth, but the story of Abraham and Isaac suggests that at one period the Hebrews performed this rite at puberty. We may note that while a ram was sacrificed in place of Isaac, Jacob appeared before his father wearing the skin of a kid, and Joseph wore a special garment which was soaked in goat's blood. We may perhaps suppose that a pretence was made of killing the child, which was wrapped in the skin of a sacrificed goat and soaked in its blood. Such a rite accounts for some of our stories, such as that of Pelops, and also for the widespread story of the Faithful Hound. In the case of Romulus, Moses and Perseus, however, as in the Japanese myth, the infant hero is set afloat. We must suppose that the pretence sacrifice took various forms, but that it was normally the father who performed the rite.

Having suffered a pretence death, our heroes are all removed to a distance and brought up either by another king, or in the cases of Jason and Asclepius, by Chiron.

The latter is easy to understand, if we may suppose that Chiron was a title given to a prince's official tutor, but in most cases the foster-father is the king of another country or city. This suggests several possibilities. The first is that it was actually the practice for kings to send their sons to be brought up by other kings, as we read of in the story of Hakon Adalstein's fostri. The second, which I have put forward elsewhere, but which I am by no means confident about, is that princes succeeded their fathers-in-law, but became their sons by formal adoption. This might necessitate a pretence that they had been removed at birth. The third is the opposite of the second. It is that in theory princes could not succeed their fathers, but in practice did so, but were reared at a distance from the capital, and represented to be foreigners. The question requires much more investigation than I have been able to give it.

We next come to point No. 9, that we are told nothing of the hero's childhood. This may seem unimportant, since there are, of course, many great men of whose childhood we know nothing. In such cases, however, we equally know nothing of the circumstances of their birth. We may know the place and date, but that is all. With our heroes it is quite different. Their birth is the central feature in a series of highly dramatic incidents; incidents which are related in considerable detail, and such incidents as seldom, if ever, occur in the lives of real people. The most surprising things happen to our hero at birth; the most surprising things happen to him as soon as he reaches manhood, but in the meanwhile nothing happens to him at all. If, as I suppose, our hero is a figure, not of history, but of ritual, this is just what one would expect, since as a general rule children take no part in ritual between the rites at their birth and those at puberty or initiation. The story of the hero of tradition, if I understand it aright, is the story of his ritual progress, and it is therefore appropriate that those parts of his career in which he makes no ritual progress should be left blank.

I would compare the blank which occurs during his childhood with the blank which usually occurs after his installation as king is complete.

The fact that on reaching manhood the hero sets out forthwith on a journey from the land of his upbringing to the land where he will reign is of course involved in the problem which I have discussed under point 8. It is, however, a remarkable fact that the hero's victories almost always take place either on the journey to which I have alluded or else immediately on arrival at his destination. He makes a definite progress from a foreign country to the throne, and all his feats and victories are connected with that progress.

This brings us to the hero's victories, and I wish to emphasise the point which I have just mentioned, namely that the victories of the hero of tradition, unlike those of the hero-king of history, always take place before his accession to the throne. Another remarkable fact is that the hero of tradition never wins a battle. It is very rarely that he is represented as having any army at all, and when he has one he never seems to train it or direct it in any way. In history the king as warrior means the king as commander, and this applies to savages as well as to the civilised. When we think of the great victors of history we think of serried ranks, of the Argyraspides, of the Tenth Legion, and so on. But the hero of tradition is never a commander. All his victories, when they are actual fights and not merely magical contests, are single combats against other kings, or against giants, dragons or especially noted wild animals. He never fights with ordinary men, or even with ordinary animals. And the king with whom he fights is the king whom he will succeed; in the case of Oedipus and Romulus his own father, and in other cases his future father-in-law. It is also possible that the giant or monster with whom the hero fights is merely the reigning king in disguise, or in other words that the reigning king had to wear a particular costume or mask in which to defend his title and his life. I will touch

on this later, but will first pass on to the magical contest, which seems sometimes to be more important than the actual fight. Oedipus wins his throne by guessing a riddle; Theseus by escaping from a maze. The magical victories of the three Jewish heroes are all connected with rain-making. Joseph successfully prognosticates the weather; Moses is successful in a series of magical contests in which rain-making is included, and Elijah defeats the prophets of Baal in a rain-making contest. Power over the elements is the most unvarying characteristic of the divine king, and it would seem that in many cases the candidate for the throne had to pass in a rain-making test.

Our hero, then, has to qualify for the throne in two ways. He must pass an examination in such subjects as rain-making and riddle-guessing, and he must win a victory over the reigning king. Whether this was a real fight or a mock contest in which the conclusion was foregone we cannot be certain. There have undoubtedly been many cases in which the king was put to death at the end of a fixed term, or when his powers began to wane. There may have been cases in which there was a fair fight with equal weapons between the king and his challenger, but the evidence for them is rather uncertain. What several of the stories suggest is that the old king was ritually killed, and that his successor had to kill an animal—wolf, boar or snake, into which his spirit was supposed to have entered.

After passing his tests and winning his victories the hero marries the daughter, or widow, of his predecessor, and becomes king. It has often been assumed from this that the throne always went in the female line, and that the reigning queen, or heiress princess, as the case might be, could confer it upon her husband simply by marrying him; in other words that any man who managed to marry the queen became king automatically, whatever his antecedents, and that the only way in which any man could lawfully become king was by marrying the queen. Such an assumption is

going a great deal beyond the evidence of the stories, which suggest that the new king established his claim to the throne by his pedigree, his upbringing and his victories. There were, it would seem, recognised qualifications for the kingship, just as there were recognised qualifications for the queenship. We do not know for certain that the new queen was really the old king's daughter, any more than we know for certain that the new king was really the old king's son. There may have been a ceremony of adoption in both cases. Anyhow the fact that our hero marries a princess and at the same time ascends the throne is far from proving that he ascends the throne in virtue of his marriage. It may merely indicate what we know from other sources to be a fact, namely that a *hieros gamos* normally formed an essential and highly important feature of the coronation or installation ceremony. I know of no case, in any age or in any country, in which a man has become king simply by marrying the queen; he must, so far as I can learn, always first have qualified for the throne, either by birth or by performing some feat or passing some test. Our heroes seem all to have qualified in all these ways. Even to-day in Europe marriage never confers the right to a throne. Princes or princesses who marry unqualified persons, who contract, that is to say, what are called morganatic marriages, not merely fail to raise their partners to the throne but lose their own right to it. It is difficult to believe that the rules were less strict in ages in which the ritual functions of the king and queen were far more important than they are to-day. Our hero, then, as part of his installation ritual, marries the daughter, or widow, of his predecessor. And what does he do then? It might be supposed that, having shown himself so brave and enterprising before coming to the throne, he would forthwith embark upon a career of conquest, found an empire and a dynasty, build temples and palaces, possess a large harem, and behave generally as the conquerors of history have behaved, or attempted to

behave. The hero of tradition, however, in this as in all other respects, is totally unlike the hero of history.

He never goes to war, never extends the boundaries of his kingdom, never builds anything. In fact he does nothing at all. The only memorial of his reign, apart from the traditional story of the events which begin and end it, is the traditional code of laws which is often attributed to him. As a fact, however, a code of laws is always the product of hundreds or thousands of years of gradual development, and is never in any sense the work of one man. One man, a Justinian or a Napoleon, may cause laws to be codified, or alter their incidence, but it has never been suggested that all, or even any, of the laws in such codes were devised by the monarchs in question. It is well known, in fact, that they were not. On the other hand it has been clearly shown by Sir James Frazer that the Ten Commandments, in their familiar form, could have had nothing to do with Moses, since the original Ten Commandments, whoever first wrote them down, were entirely different. It seems clear, then, that the attribution of laws to a hero of tradition is merely a way of saying that they are very old and sacred. We next come to the important fact that the hero of tradition, unlike the hero of the fairy tale and many heroes of history, ends his career by being deposed, driven from his kingdom, and mysteriously put to death. This happens to the majority of our heroes, and when it does not their end is usually left uncertain. Even in the case of Joseph we are told of nothing that happened between his father's death and his own. We may conclude that deposition and mysterious death is the normal fate of a hero of tradition. There is one very puzzling feature, however, which is that the hero is never actually defeated in a fight. As he has gained the throne by winning a fight, one might expect that he would lose it by losing a fight, but this he never does.

Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother; one might expect that one of his sons, or some other prince,

would kill him and marry Jocasta, or if she were too old Antigone, and become king. Creon, however, who succeeds him, does so by turning the oracle against him, and we find in several other cases that the hero falls out with a god and of course gets the worst of it. Perhaps the explanation is that when he began to grow old, or his tenure of the kingship, which Sir James Frazer puts at eight years in prehistoric Greece, had expired, there was a magical contest in which he was foredoomed to defeat. It is to be noted that the hero's fall from favour is sudden and not gradual; at one moment he is apparently at the height of his power and popularity, and at the next moment both gods and men are against him.

The next point to note is that the heroes I have cited never meet their fate inside their cities. In many cases they are actually deposed and driven out, in others they have left it on some sacred mission. Then there is the hill-top, which appears in the stories of Oedipus, Theseus, Heracles, Bellerophon, Dionysus and Moses. Taken in conjunction with the chariot of fire in which Romulus and Elijah disappear, and the lightning-flash which kills Asclepius, we may conclude that in the most usual form of the rite the divine king was burned, either alive or dead, on a pyre erected on top of a hill, and that he was believed to ascend to the sky, in some form or other, in the smoke and flame. In that case it is clear that the person or animal defeated and killed by his successor could not have been himself, but must have been an assumed reincarnation.

The fact that the hero is very seldom succeeded by his son might be explained by supposing that the descent went in the female line. In that case he would be succeeded by his daughter, but he is not. If the king reigned for eight or nine years only, and married at his coronation, it would obviously be impossible for his children to succeed him, since they would be too young, but they might succeed his successor, and this is what seems sometimes to have

happened. The story of Creon is not easy to follow, but he seems to have preceded and succeeded Oedipus, and also to have succeeded his sons. Perseus is said to have killed and succeeded Proetus, and to have been killed and succeeded by his son. Aegisthus kills and succeeds Agamemnon, and eight years later Orestes kills and succeeds Aegisthus. There are similar incidents in the stories of Theseus and Jason. There were two ruling families at Sparta, each of which found one of the two kings, and it seems possible that in prehistoric times each city had two ruling families which produced a king alternately.

The last point in the hero's career is that although he is usually supposed to have vanished mysteriously, yet nevertheless he has a holy sepulchre, if not several. I have attempted to explain this vanishing as being cremation, but if kings were cremated, they could hardly have a sepulchre or burial-place in the usual sense of the term, for we know that in all forms of religion the essential feature of a sepulchre, or shrine, is that it is supposed to contain the bones, or at any rate some of the bones, of the holy person to whom it is dedicated. A great deal has of course been written on the customs of the Greeks with regard to the disposal of the dead and their beliefs as to the other world, but I am here concerned chiefly to consider the existence, or possible existence, of rites in connection with the hero stories, and what they suggest to me, that while ordinary people were buried, the bodies of kings were burnt, but not burnt thoroughly, so that the bones were left, and could be buried. I believe that this view was put forward, though on different grounds, by Dorpfeld some thirty years ago, though I have not seen what he wrote. Anyhow similar customs are found in various parts of the world.

I have, I hope, now convinced you that the parallels between the stories of the various heroes of tradition are too numerous to be mere coincidences; and that they can be explained as incidents in ritual. Are we to conclude that

all these heroes are mythical? In my own opinion most of them at any rate are purely mythical, but I have arrived at this opinion on somewhat different grounds. It by no means necessarily follows from the facts which I have just put before you. When we are told that Alexander the Great was the son of Zeus, who approached his mother in the form of a serpent, we do not conclude that he was mythical, nor when we read in Herodotus that the maternal grandfather of Cyrus ordered him to be killed at birth, do we conclude that Cyrus was mythical. What we conclude, at least I do, is that the pattern career for a hero was generally known, and that either from flattery, or from a genuine belief that the career of a hero must conform to type, mythical incidents were introduced into the story of genuinely historical heroes. It follows from this, however, that the earlier heroes must have been mythical, else the mythical type could not have arisen. The only possible alternative, and one that seems to me highly improbable, is that Oedipus was a really historical character, who killed his father, married his mother, and so on, but did it all as part of a fixed ritual.

As for the Freudian explanation, it is to say the least inadequate, since it only takes into account two incidents out of at least twenty-two, and we find that the rest of the story is the same whether the hero marries his mother, his sister or his first cousin.

The fault to which we are all of us liable, but which I have done my best to avoid, is to concentrate on one particular incident or one particular aspect, and to disregard everything else. This is what has been done by many classical scholars. Brought up on Homer and the Attic dramatists, they tend to concentrate not on what the heroes of tradition are actually alleged to have done, but on the words which the poets have put into their mouths. On these they base character studies of the heroes, oblivious of the fact that the whole art of the great poets lay in putting new words

into the mouths of old characters. The fact is, I am afraid, that classical scholars as a whole are romantically rather than scientifically minded. The reading of the *Iliad* or of the *Seven Against Thebes* fills them with emotion, but they are unwilling to admit that it is emotion of exactly the same type as that experienced by the small boy who reads *Treasure Island*, and therefore they conceal it under a veil of pseudo-history. This veil takes the form of a belief in a "Heroic Age", in which, apparently, the principal features of life were single combats, elopements and dragons. In my view it is just as reasonable to suppose that there was once a "Comic Age" in which life consisted of backchat and disguises, and a "Tragic Age", in which lovers always came to an untimely end. Our knowledge of all three is derived from the poets, and the poets are not interested in historical truth. Very few people are. It is always assumed by historians that people prefer fact to fiction, but they need only go as far as the nearest lending library to find out that there is not the slightest foundation for this assumption. Homer is read, not because his readers are eager for historical accuracy, but because he wrote good stories, and he will still be read when it has come to be generally realised that these stories have not the slightest historical foundation.

RAGLAN